United Nations A/53/233

General Assembly

Distr.: General
8 October 1998

Original: English

Fifty-third session

Request for the inclusion of an item in the agenda of the fifty-third session

Dialogue among civilizations

Letter dated 5 October 1998 from the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to request the inclusion of an item entitled "Dialogue among civilizations" in the agenda of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, in accordance with rule 15 of its rules of procedure.

Pursuant to rule 20 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, this request is accompanied by an explanatory memorandum describing the importance of this item and the need for the United Nations to address this issue attentively through its General Assembly (see annex I), and a draft resolution (see annex II). In view of the special significance of the proposed item, which is of relevance to many different aspects of the work of the Assembly, I would also request that this item be considered directly in plenary meetings of the Assembly, without referral to a main committee.

(*Signed*) Hadi **Nejad-Hosseinian**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex I

Dialogue among civilizations

Explanatory memorandum for additional item on the agenda of the fifty-third session

The twentieth century has witnessed some of the deadliest and most devastating conflicts. Following two atrocious world wars, the international community set out to arrest this destructive trend, save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, and encourage and engage in a new course, replacing clash and bloodshed with tolerance and cooperation.

The last decades of this millennium have been symbolized by a universal desire to promote peace, the rule of law, tolerance and understanding, and ensure social, economic and political progress for all, regardless of historical and cultural backgrounds. The advent of technology has also become a catalyst in enhancing interaction among societies and individuals. Distance is becoming ever less, a measure of physical separation rather than of viewpoints and opinions.

Such progress has not come easy since old habits fade only after resistance and friction. But they do move away. Tendencies that seek new rivalries, invoke new confrontations, initiate a renewed race for power and dominance, sow discord and dissent, and invite isolation and exclusion are doomed to disappear in despair.

To ensure that man will never again resort to hostility and conflict as a means to achieve his objectives and will rely increasingly on its ability to persuade and convince, the international community should underline the imperative of dialogue as the accepted mode of interaction and settlement of differences. Dialogue is the essential element and the key to understanding, which opens the gates to progress and prosperity.

The United Nations has also been built around this idea, and has systematically and progressively worked towards institutionalizing dialogue and to extend its realm to include all spheres of life as they affect the development of a better future. Maintenance of international peace and security, developing friendly relations among nations and achieving international cooperation in solving international problems, as the Charter of the United Nations projects, are all centred on dialogue and understanding.

At the turn of the millennium, it is thus imperative that the international community shows its determination to promote, encourage and facilitate dialogue and understanding between various cultures and civilizations, thereby promoting peace, tolerance and cooperation. Civilizations have enriched each other through constant interaction, while preserving their respective identities. Diverse civilizational achievements of mankind crystallize cultural pluralism and creative human diversity. Positive and mutually beneficial interaction among civilizations has continued throughout human history despite impediments arising from disputes and wars.

The Eighth Summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, in its Tehran Declaration, emphasized the imperative of positive interaction, dialogue and understanding among cultures and religions, and rejected the theories of clash and conflict, which breed mistrust and diminish the grounds for peaceful interaction among nations. In the Twelfth Non-Aligned Summit, held at Durban, South Africa, the heads of State or Government expressed their concern at attempts to suggest divisions between cultures and civilizations, reiterated that despite conflict and war throughout human history, positive interaction and fusion between cultures and civilizations has continued for the benefit of the entire

humanity, and expressed their resolve to facilitate and promote enhanced dialogue between cultures and civilizations at the turn of the millennium.

The United Nations, as the centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of common ends, should have the central role in the promotion of dialogue among civilizations and cultures. It is on this basis that President Khatami suggested that this item be placed on the agenda of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, and a resolution be adopted in the course of the current session to designate the year 2001 the United Nations Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations, so that humanity begins the new millennium with a determination to build a better tomorrow based on dialogue and mutual respect. The designation of such a Year would provide Governments and relevant international and non-governmental organizations with an opportunity to plan and implement appropriate cultural, educational and social programmes to promote the concept of dialogue among civilizations, including through organizing conferences and seminars and dissemination of information and scholarly material on the subject.

Annex II

Draft resolution

United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations

The General Assembly,

Reaffirming the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which, *inter alia*, call for collective effort to strengthen friendly relations among nations, remove threats to the peace and promote international cooperation to resolve international issues of economic, social, cultural and humanitarian character,

Recognizing the diverse civilizational achievements of mankind, crystallizing cultural pluralism and creative human diversity,

Aware that positive and mutually beneficial interaction among civilizations has continued throughout human history despite impediments arising from disputes and wars,

Emphasizing the imperative of tolerance in international relations and the significant role of dialogue as a means to reach understanding, remove threats to peace and strengthen interaction and exchange among civilizations,

Reaffirming that civilizational achievements constitute the common heritage of mankind, providing a source of inspiration and progress for humanity at large,

Welcoming the collective endeavour of the international community to enhance understanding through constructive dialogue among civilizations at the threshold of the third millennium,

1. *Expresses* its firm determination to facilitate and promote dialogue between nations;

2. *Decides* to designate the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations;

3. *Invites* Governments and relevant international and non-governmental organizations to plan and implement appropriate cultural, educational and social programmes to promote the concept of dialogue among civilizations, including through organizing conferences and seminars and dissemination of information and scholarly material on the subject, and to inform the Secretary-General of their activities;

4. *Requests* the Secretary-General to present a provisional report on activities in this regard to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, and a final report to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session.